

1 TO THE HONORABLE SENATE:

2 The Committee on Agriculture to which was referred House Bill No. 903
3 entitled “An act relating to regenerative farming” respectfully reports that it
4 has considered the same and recommends that the Senate propose to the House
5 that the bill be amended by striking out all after the enacting clause and
6 inserting in lieu thereof the following:

7 Sec. 1. FINDINGS

8 The General Assembly finds that:

9 (1) Farmers in Vermont face significant economic pressures as the costs
10 of production often exceed prices paid for milk or other products.

11 (2) Many farmers have adopted regenerative farming practices to benefit
12 from reduced input costs, improved yields, and better resilience to climatic
13 extremes.

14 (3) Simultaneously with market conditions, farmers are facing
15 regulatory pressures to improve management of agricultural waste and satisfy
16 standards for the sale of food products.

17 (4) Some Vermont farmers may benefit economically from adopting
18 regenerative farming practices.

19 (5) Regenerative agriculture describes farming and grazing practices
20 that, among other benefits, reverse climate change by rebuilding organic matter

1 in soil and restoring degraded soil biodiversity, resulting in carbon drawdown,
2 improved retention of water in the soil, and improved water quality.

3 (6) Regenerative agriculture regenerates soil and revitalizes soil health,
4 which may be essential to preserve farming in Vermont as the U.S. Department
5 of Agriculture’s Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) calculated
6 that Vermont farmland loses on average 1.5 to 1.8 tons of soil per acre per year
7 due to erosion by water.

8 (7) Through the Required Agricultural Practices, adopted under
9 6 V.S.A. § 4810, all farms in Vermont must adopt practices that improve soil
10 health and water quality, including required cover cropping on floodplain
11 fields and reducing erosion rates through the adoption of soil conservation
12 management techniques.

13 (8) The Vermont Agricultural Water Quality Partnership (VAWQP) is
14 dedicated to collaborating with and supporting agricultural producers in their
15 efforts to improve water quality and improve soil health. The VAWQP is
16 composed of the agencies and organizations that signed the Lake Champlain
17 Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in January 2012. The MOU partners
18 currently include the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources
19 Conservation Service, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Farm Service
20 Agency, the Vermont Association of Conservation Districts, the U.S. Fish and
21 Wildlife Service, the University of Vermont Extension, the Agency of Natural

1 Resources, the Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets, the Vermont
2 Housing and Conservation Board, and the Lake Champlain Basin Program.

3 (9) The State of Vermont should establish a voluntary program to assist
4 farmers to adopt regenerative farming practices and certify those farmers who
5 have achieved a level of implementation that: contributes to generating or
6 building soils and soil fertility and health; increases water percolation;
7 increases water retention; increases the amount of clean water running off
8 farms; increases biodiversity and ecosystem health and resiliency; and
9 sequesters carbon in soils.

10 Sec. 2. 6 V.S.A. chapter 215, subchapter 7A is added to read:

11 Subchapter 7A. Regenerative Farming

12 § 4961. PURPOSE

13 The purposes of this subchapter are to:

14 (1) enhance the economic viability of farms in Vermont;

15 (2) improve the health and productivity of the soils of Vermont;

16 (3) encourage farmers to implement regenerative farming practices;

17 (4) reduce the amount of agricultural waste entering the waters of

18 Vermont;

19 (5) enhance crop resilience to rainfall fluctuations and mitigate water
20 damage to crops, land, and surrounding infrastructure;

21 (6) promote cost-effective farming practices;

1 (7) reinvigorate the rural economy; and

2 (8) help the next generation of Vermont farmers learn regenerative

3 farming practices so that farming remains integral to the economy, landscape,

4 and culture of Vermont.

5 § 4962. DEFINITIONS

6 As used in this subchapter:

7 (1) “Certified Vermont Environmental Steward” means an owner or

8 operator of a farm who has achieved the thresholds for the Vermont

9 Environmental Stewardship Program to be certified as a farm that improves

10 soil health and contributes to improving water quality.

11 (2) “Regenerative farming” means a series of cropland management

12 practices that:

13 (A) contributes to generating or building soils and soil fertility and

14 health;

15 (B) increases water percolation, increases water retention, and

16 increases the amount of clean water running off farms;

17 (C) increases biodiversity and ecosystem health and resiliency; and

18 (D) sequesters carbon in agricultural soils.

1 § 4963. REGENERATIVE FARMING; VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL
2 STEWARDSHIP PROGRAM

3 (a) Establishment of program. There is created within the Agency of
4 Agriculture, Food and Markets the Vermont Environmental Stewardship
5 Program (VESP) to provide technical and financial assistance to Vermont
6 farmers seeking to implement regenerative farming practices to achieve
7 certification as a Certified Vermont Environmental Steward.

8 (b) Program standards; application. The Secretary of Agriculture, Food
9 and Markets shall establish by procedure standards for certification as a
10 Certified Environmental Steward. Application for certification shall be made
11 in the manner required by the Secretary of Agriculture, Food and Markets.

12 (c) Program services. The VESP shall provide the following services to
13 farmers voluntarily seeking to transition to achieve certification as a Certified
14 Vermont Environmental Steward:

15 (1) information and education regarding the requirements for
16 certification, including the method, timeline, and process of certification;

17 (2) technical assistance in completing any required application for
18 certification;

19 (3) technical assistance in developing plans and implementing practices
20 to achieve certification from the VESP; and

1 (4) technical assistance in complying with the requirements of the VESP
2 after a farm is certified.

3 (d) Financial assistance; eligibility. An owner or operator of a farm
4 participating in the VESP shall be eligible for financial assistance from
5 existing Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets financial assistance
6 programs for costs incurred in implementing any of the practices required for
7 certification as a Certified Environmental Steward.

8 (e) Revocation of certification. The Secretary may, after due notice and
9 hearing, revoke a certification issued under this section when the owner or
10 operator of a certified farm fails to comply with the standards for certification
11 established under subsection (b) of this section.

12 (f) Administrative penalty; falsely advertising. The Secretary may assess
13 an administrative penalty of up to \$1,000.00 against the owner or operator of a
14 farm who knowingly advertises as a Certified Environmental Steward when
15 not certified by the Secretary.

16 Sec. 3. FUNDING VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP
17 PROGRAM

18 The Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets shall use funds available to
19 the Agency and eligible for use for water quality programs or projects to
20 provide financial assistance to Vermont farmers participating in the Vermont
21 Environmental Stewardship Program to implement regenerative farming

1 practices to achieve certification as a Certified Vermont Environmental
2 Steward.

3 Sec. 4. EFFECTIVE DATE

4 This act shall take effect on July 1, 2018.

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7 (Committee vote: _____)

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Senator _____

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FOR THE COMMITTEE